

crabs, squids, an octopus — if I were to attempt to list all that I saw I would surely fill another page. But even amidst such splendid variety there was one type of creature that captured my immediate attention. Roaming amongst the coral and the kelp were sharks whose size would have been enough to frighten the strongest of men. There were many species of shark, with one oddity in their distribution. No shark that was considered harmless was anywhere to be seen. The waters were patrolled by great whites, hammerheads, and many other lethal subspecies.

"Don't worry about them," Cyrene tried to reassure me, pulling me by my coat sleeve to our table in the far corner. "Look out there." She pointed off behind the outermost coral reef, and for a moment I did not see anything.

"Wait. They're coming."

I still could not see anything and was about to stop trying when I caught a shadow gliding through the darkness; then another, and then many others. The large shadows passed under the furthest of the colored searchlights. I watched in awe as a pack of six gray whales emerged from a sapphire mist and made a lazy approach toward the restaurant. Everything got out of their way, even the sharks. I was afraid they would keep coming and perhaps collide with the windows, but they slowed their approach and remained at the outskirts of the inner coral reef.

To put it bluntly, I am certain that I had never seen so amazing a sight in my life. I sat down in my chair, never once taking my eyes off the windows. I followed the movements of the whales for another five minutes before Cyrene snapped me out of my trance, placing a menu in my lap.

"Come on," she grinned, "the sooner we order the sooner we can eat!"

I looked up at her, then back down at my menu, which I read under the eerie fluorescent green light projected from the water. The menu had everything I could ever have wanted and more. For starters there was salmon, prawns, and oysters. I flipped the page and did not even bother to read beyond the first few lines, because already I had seen many deliciously described entrees. The waitress came over, but before I had a chance to say anything Cyrene ordered us both the chef's special. This was agreeable, so I took the opportunity to scan the restaurant's patrons.

Nearly every table was full, and those seated at the tables were very much like me. They looked like

normal people out for a good dinner. Most were couples, but there were also some families and people seated by themselves. The wait staff were all women, and I noticed with a start that they all bore some resemblance to Cyrene. Warning bells went off in my head as I tried to explain away the coincidence, but no matter how many times I looked down at the table and then back up at the waitresses, I saw that they all had very similar hairstyles with strongly bleached ends.

"What is going on here?" I asked, somewhat too directly for politeness. "I mean, they all look like you. Is this your families place?"

Cyrene looked up at me and smiled, gesturing toward the kitchen doors. "Look. Our food is coming already!"

I turned and saw that this indeed was the case, but still I could not shake the feeling that something was terribly amiss. In the corner of my eye I noticed that all of the creatures had slowed their motions except for the sharks, which were moving in closer. I was becoming very frightened, but again I heard Cyrene's voice, and my focus was directed at her.

"Come on. Eat, eat!! That's why we came, isn't it!"

She held up a superbly prepared prawn coated with rare and expensive spices. I looked down at the plate of food which had been placed before me. Without question, the chefs were first rate. I had never seen seafood prepared so well. My mouth started to water as I reached for the prawn that Cyrene held out. As I took it, I could not help but notice the motion, or lack thereof, of the sea-life outside of the windows. I was shocked and somewhat horrified to see that all of the fish had stopped swimming, and that they all had turned toward me. I felt as though I must be going crazy, for it certainly did seem as though every fish in the sea was watching me. Was this possible? The sharks were now moving more aggressively than ever.

"Eat... eat..." Cyrene repeated, her voice a whisper from afar.

I held the prawn up to my lips and opened my mouth. Yes, it was true, the spices were extraordinary. The scent drove me mad with hunger. I placed the prawn into my mouth...

but I could not bring myself to chew.

It struck me with the force of all the waves in all the seven seas. How could I sit here in the midst of this Neptunian garden, and all of its amazing varieties of life, and then eat what lay here before me? How could I do this? I could not. I threw the prawn back onto my plate.